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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,  
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN  
USAID/ANE/MEA  
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH  
PARIS FOR O'FRIEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

#### Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, July 9, are reports about the Palestinian Prime Minister's threat to resign as the head of the Palestinian government amidst tension within the Palestinian leadership over negotiations with Israel. Front pages also report on the situation in Iraq highlighting Iraqi "guerilla" attacks against Coalition forces and the latest audio tape, claimed to have been made by Saddam Hussein, urging Iraqis to launch "covert" attacks as "the best way to end the occupation".

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "The stage of difficult tests"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (07/09) editorializes: "Facts on the ground in the Palestinian territory seems to be very complicated and difficult.. The suffering of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas seems quite evident as he tries to reconcile between the various contradictions on the Palestinian front and manage negotiations with the Israeli side that continues to carry out maneuvers in an attempt to jeopardize everything that Mr. Abbas is trying to achieve.. The Islamic Jihad Movement did well to declare that the latest operation, which was done by one of its members, had not been part of its program and that it is committed to the truce. Yet, as important as this clarification is, there has to be total control over such action, in order not to give the Israelis the pretext or the justification for refusing the release of prisoners who belong to those Palestinian factions.. We continue to urge the Palestinian factions to block Israel's way and call for further American follow-up and direct mediation in order to remove the obstacles that Israel is placing in the path to peace and help everyone overcome this stage of difficult tests".

-- "When Mahmoud Abbas resigns"

Semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (07/09) editorializes: "The resignation of the Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas from Fateh takes the Palestinian domestic front back to square one, just when things have started to look like they were heading towards calm and quiet.. Pushing Abbas against the wall and tying his hands behind his back achieves nothing but what we think would be a not so noble objective, simply because it means suicide. This is because the hole that would be left by Abbas' resignation from government will prove to be a success and an opportunity for the Sharon government to portray itself as the one that wants peace and the Palestinians as wanting nothing but extremism and terrorism; Israeli charges by all means". GNEHM